

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT PLANNING & TRANSPORT COMMITTEE		
DATE: 2021	15th MARCH		
TITLE:	HIGHWAY ASSET MANAGEMENT - INTERVENTION CRITERIA AND REPAIR FREQUENCY REGIME.		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR PAGE	PORTFOLIO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT
SERVICE:	ENVIRONMENTAL & COMMERCIAL SERVICES	WARDS:	BOROUGH WIDE
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1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval to amend the intervention level criteria in relation to highway defects for a trial 6-month period and to seek a change to highway safety defect repair times.
- 1.2 The Council is making a £9M Capital Investment into residential roads and pavements over 3 years which is addressing the repair of residential roads in most need. This programme has reduced the demand on pothole repairs considerably and has enabled the transition to addressing defects of a lesser depth manageable.
- 1.3 The Council's current highway safety defect repair frequency regime currently requires 'Category R1' repairs to be completed within 24 hrs. It is proposed to amend this to 'the next working day'.
- 1.4 The report sets out the current position and the options available in relation to the proposed changes.

2.0 RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the Committee notes and approves the 6-month trial to reduce the carriageway safety defect intervention level criteria.
- 2.2 That the Committee notes and approves the changes to the highway safety defect repair times.

3.0 POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 To secure the most effective use of resources in the delivery of high quality, best value public service.
- 3.2 To make travel more secure, safe and comfortable for all users of the public highway.
- 3.3 To provide a public highway network as safe as reasonably practical having due regard to financial constraints and statutory duties.

4.0 PROPOSED CARRIAGEWAY SAFETY DEFECT INTERVENTION LEVEL CRITERIA

- 4.1 Reading Borough Council currently class an actionable carriageway defect as having a minimum of 50mm depth over an approx. area of 300mm x 300mm. The Highway Inspector can also action defects of a smaller size if they are concerned that leaving that defect would pose too great a risk when taking into account various criteria including the location within the highway, traffic and pedestrian volumes and the classification of the road.
- 4.2 The Highways Team reviewed their inspection and repair regime 3 years ago. Service improvements include the introduction of an electronic system allowing inspections to be carried out by handheld tablet with the defects being sent electronically to the Highways & Drainage Manager who then assigns them to the repair gangs directly on their tablets. This has shown an increase in efficiency of the whole process and repairs response times have improved significantly.
- 4.3 It should be noted that the Council £9M Capital Investment into residential roads and pavements over 3 years (2020/21 to 2022/23) is addressing the residential roads in most need. Associated with this programme is an extensive pre-patching regime in advance of surfacing, which is addressing defects of a lesser depth and increasing the structural integrity of the carriageway. This programme has reduced the demand on pothole repairs considerably, which, along with the service improvements mentioned above, will enable the transition to addressing defects of a lesser depth manageable. This improved efficiency provides an opportunity to review our current defect intervention level criteria. By amending the intervention level to, for example, anything over 40mm depth over an approx. area of 300mm x 300mm, then in theory the Council should be able to improve customer satisfaction, road safety and improve on an existing good record of successfully defending public liability claims, as we would be treating some 'defects' earlier than we currently do. Analysis of our performance compared with our standard defect repair times has shown that the Highway Works Team are exceeding the performance standard for repair times, (defects are being repaired quicker than required), which shows that there is currently some spare capacity.
- 4.4 Benchmarking has shown that there is a variation nationally in what councils define as a defect (although 40mm is now more widely used). It should be noted that the code of practice requires the inspection and repair regime to be developed based on a risk assessment and provide a practical and reasonable approach, so it does not automatically follow that if others do something, the Council needs to do it too. The Council does need to review processes and check that they consider them reasonable

and that any change to the intervention levels criteria would not affect deliverability nor adversely affect the risk to the Council.

4.5 Options to consider:

Option 1 - Maintain current intervention level of 50 mm over an approx. area of 300mm x 300mm. This has provided a robust defence against claims over the last two decades but efficiencies within the process of identifying and repairing defects provides an opportunity to review this intervention level.

Option 2 - Introduce a 6-month trial to amend intervention level to over 40 mm depth over an approx. area of 300mm x 300mm. The identification and repair of smaller defects may help to address defects earlier thereby improving the overall quality of the road surface, reducing risk and increasing customer satisfaction. A 6-month trial period would allow the full impact of the policy change to be considered including resource and financial implications.

Option 3 - Amend intervention level to anything over 40 mm depth over an approx. area of 300mm x 300mm. This will address defects earlier thereby improving customer satisfaction and reducing risk. This will require additional time to inspect (managed within existing resources) and initially extra costs to repair.

Option 4 - Amend intervention level to 30 mm over an approx. area of 300mm x 300mm in line with 'pothole plan'. This will require significantly additional time to inspect and require extra funding which is not available at this time.

Option 5 - Remove intervention level completely. This will require significantly more time to inspect and require substantial additional funding and resources to repair. This option is not recommended as we would be addressing very low risk defects unnecessarily.

4.6 The recommendation is to approve Option 2 - Introduce a 6-month trial to amend the carriageway intervention level to over 40 mm depth over an approx. area of 300mm x 300mm, which will address defects earlier thereby improving customer satisfaction and reducing risk.

4.7 The Highway Inspectors, as part of the risk-based approach, are able to raise repair orders on defects of a lesser depth in areas where they consider appropriate. These additional defect repairs have been accommodated within the current budgets and there has not been a repair time pressure in dealing with these additional defects.

4.8 Due to a proactive repair programme, there has been a substantial decrease in the number of potholes requiring repair resulting in fewer actionable potholes repaired during 2020 compared to previous years, as follows:

- There were 2,813 potholes repaired during 2020
- There were 3,863 potholes repaired during 2019
- There were 3,116 potholes repaired during 2018
- There were 5,020 potholes repaired during 2017

4.9 Years 2 and 3 of the £9M Residential Road Programme will help us continue to manage the number of potholes as more roads are resurfaced, which will reduce the chances of potholes forming in the first place.

4.10 The review following the trial will consider all these factors, as well as the Council's repair time performance and a report will be brought back to this committee on the findings.

5.0 **PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CARRIAGEWAY SAFETY DEFECT REPAIR TIMES**

5.1 The Council's current highway safety defect repair frequency regime is as follows:

Potholes meeting the criteria are identified and works orders are placed for patching work to be carried out. The Highway Inspector will also determine the category of repair timescale based on the following:

Category R1E - Emergency correct/repair or make safe within three hours. If it is not possible to correct/repair within 3 hours, (i.e. the defect has only been made safe), a permanent repair should be carried out within 28 calendar days. The exception to this is where more substantial maintenance/improvement works are planned within a medium timescale. This timescale should be appropriate to the defect type, location, road/footway classification and usage.

Category R1 - Correct/repair or make safe within 24 hours. If it is not possible to correct/repair within 24 hours, (i.e. the defect has only been made safe), a permanent repair should be carried out within 28 calendar days. The exception to this is where more substantial maintenance/improvement works are planned within a medium timescale. This timescale should be appropriate to the defect type, location, road/footway classification and usage.

Category R2 - Correct/repair or make safe within 7 calendar days. If it is not possible to correct/repair within 7 calendar days (i.e. the defect has only been made safe), a permanent repair should be carried out within 28 calendar days. The exception to this is where more substantial maintenance/improvement works are planned within a medium timescale. This timescale should be appropriate to the defect type, location, road/footway classification and usage.

Category R3 - A permanent repair should be carried out within 28 calendar days where appropriate.

Category 'Programmed' - Normally reviewed during next inspection

5.2 As part of ongoing Highway Asset Management work, officers have been looking into the performance of the Council's inspection and repair regimes. Analysis of the data for repairs has shown that for Category R1 (24hr) defects a number were shown to have been completed the next day but not within 24hrs of the defect having been identified for repair. In the majority of cases, these defects had been repaired between a few minutes to an hour after the 24hrs had passed. Whilst this technically means that we have not complied with our stated policy for repair of an R1 defect the fact that we have attended and at a minimum made safe the next working day is not unreasonable.

- 5.3 It is proposed to provide some practical tolerance to the R1 response time to ensure that we are not setting ourselves an unreasonable target.
- 5.4 It is therefore recommended that from April 2021 it was proposed to amend the **Category R1** repairs to:

Category R1 - Correct/repair or make safe by the close of the next working day. If it is not possible to correct/repair by the close of the next working day, (i.e. the defect has only been made safe), a permanent repair should be carried out within 28 calendar days. The exception to this is where more substantial maintenance/improvement works are planned within a medium timescale. This timescale should be appropriate to the defect type, location, road/footway classification and usage

- 5.5 No changes to the remaining repair time categories are proposed.

6.0 CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 6.1 The Highway Asset Management Policy and Well Managed Highway Infrastructure: A Code of Practice will contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan 2016 - 2019 objectives of:

- Keeping the town clean, safe, green and active
- Providing infrastructure to support the economy
- Remaining financially sustainable to deliver these service priorities

7.0 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 7.1 The Highway Asset Management Policy includes managing community expectations about how the Council manages its Highway Assets. As progress is made on implementation of Asset Management new policies and standards will be made available on the Council's website once approved by the Highway Asset Management Board.

- 7.2 The Highway Asset Management Policy is available on the Council's website.

8.0 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 In addition to the Human Rights Act 1998 the Council is required to comply with the Equalities Act 2010. Section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010 requires the Council to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

- 8.2 The Highway Asset Management Policy and Well Managed Highway Infrastructure: A Code of Practice are part of procedures to maintain the Council's existing public

highway network. There is no overall change to service delivery at this time only how those service requirements are met. Should any future updates/amendments be required, which result in service delivery changes, an equality impact assessment will be carried out.

9.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Council, as Highway Authority, has a duty under the Highways Act 1980 to carry out highway maintenance and maintain highway structures.

10.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The proposed Highway Asset Management Programme as determined by the Highway Asset Management Policy will be fully funded by the Council's Streetcare Services revenue budget for 2021/2022. The proposals set out in this report are a result of the investment in the repair of roads and from efficiencies and service improvements.

If the trial of the new policy set out in this report results in higher inspection and repair costs these must be met within the existing Revenue budgets, plus other pothole grants for this purpose that may be confirmed for 2021/22.

The evaluation will consider the square metres of repairs carried out under the trial, and their cost, as well as other factors such as the number of complaints and insurance claims.

11.0 ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 All works associated with the Highway Asset Management programme will adhere to the asset management principles of delivering efficiencies and best value, reduction in duplications and streamlining processes. All works contracts will include a carbon reduction and environmental requirement aimed at reducing the impact on the environment by highway engineering works. The intent is to reduce the amount of carbon used to produce the materials by using lower temperature products, use of recycled materials and reducing the uncontrolled waste in the environment to reduce pollution of the natural environment.

12.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 12.1 Well-managed Highway Infrastructure: A code of practice
- 12.2 Highway Asset Management Policy
- 12.3 Highway Maintenance Manual